

**METRO & STATE**

# Corner stores to promote fresh food

The city of Minneapolis created a program to help stores redesign their layouts.

PUBLISHED: 11/03/2010

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For many people on a budget, fresh and healthy foods are hard to find.

The city of Minneapolis hopes to make that less of a problem this fall with a program to help corner stores redesign their layouts and marketing to promote fresh produce.

Convenience stores like West Bank Grocery and VitaLife Rx Pharmacy will have fresh fruits, vegetables and other healthy foods within a few weeks thanks to the Healthy Corner Store Program. The program focuses on low-income communities — North and South Minneapolis, the Cedar-Riverside neighborhood, the Philips area and the Seward area — where residents are less likely to go to full-fledged grocery stores.

The program is “a strategy to bring healthy foods into our low-income communities,” said Aliyah Ali, the head program developer of the program.

Obesity and low-income status are linked, Ali said, because low-income areas have more fast food restaurants, and “it’s easier if you’re working one, two or three jobs to get your family a pizza for five bucks” than to get to a grocery store.

Ali said the highest racial health disparities are among the urban-Indian, black and Latino communities.

Multiple University of Minnesota studies have shown predominately black communities have fewer supermarkets.

The research team called communities like these “food deserts.”

VitaLife Rx Pharmacy in Northwest Minneapolis had its redesign kickoff last week, store manager Melissa Picult said.

“The problem with this neighborhood is people come in to buy soda and chips for the most part,” Picult said.

The West Bank Grocery store, on Cedar Avenue near the University campus, will have a similar setup come December, Ali said.

Participating stores agree to sell a minimum amount of fresh produce in exchange for help from the city with layout, marketing and training for pricing and stocking the foods.

The program strives to make fresh foods more visible, she said.

“[The] idea behind this program is: How can we work with existing infrastructure to bring healthier foods within the community?” she said. “And since we have such a huge existing base of corner stores, it was just a natural fit.”

“It’s going to be a slow process, I think, of just getting ... the rest of the community involved and letting them know that it’s here.” she said.

By also having discounted deals on healthy featured foods, the program will provide a domino effect in getting the community eating healthier, Picult said.

“We’ve been here about two years now,” she said of the store. “We see these kids come in with their parents, and their parents let them buy bags of chips and a soda like around dinner time and they talk about going to McDonald’s.”

The program caters to stores like Cedar-Riverside’s West Bank Grocery where these cultures that are predominant. Ali said that having these stores would help combat obesity and reduce chronic illness with the higher availability of fresh produce.

The Corner Store Program was first approved in April after a study showed the little produce stores had been often displayed in plain sight.

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ARTICLE URL: <http://www.mndaily.com/2010/11/03/corner-stores-promote-fresh-food>

Mon Nov 08 2010

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**MINNESOTA DAILY**